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Korzookeen, John A.

Arctic routes to Siberia

New York

1919

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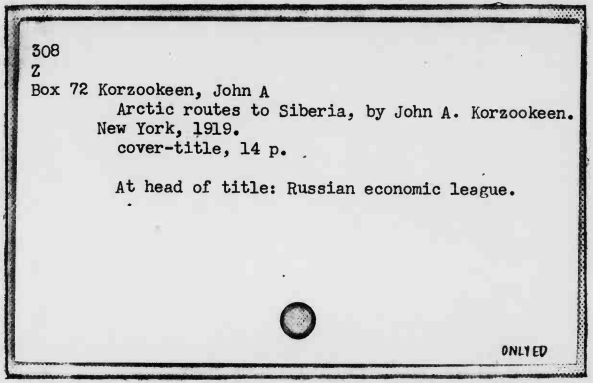

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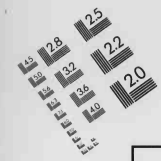

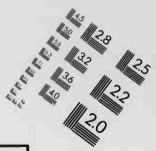

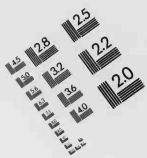

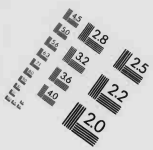

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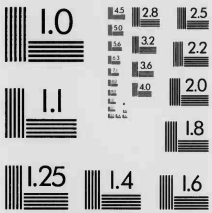

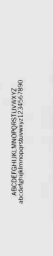

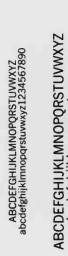

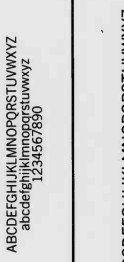

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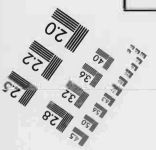

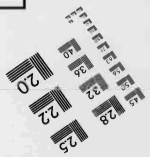

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RUSSIAN ECONOMIC LEAGUE

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ARCTIC ROUTES TO SIBERIA

By JOHN A. KORZOOKEEN

Mining Engineer, Prof. of the Mining Institute in Petrograd.

New York City
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Arctic Routes to Siberia

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For centuries the problem of finding a sea route around Siberia has occupied the minds of navigators and statesmen. Records of practical attempts to find a way from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific by way of the Arctic begin with the XVI Century, and data regarding these are to be found in many works of reference. What is much less known outside Europe is that the route from Archangel, or more properly, from the Atlantic Ocean to Siberia, was discovered by the Russians at a much earlier date.

There is in Russia reliable evidence that as early as the XVI Century inhabitants of Novgorod sailed from the mouth of the Dvina River by the way of the White and Kara Seas, passing the Yamal peninsula into the Gulf of Ob, and the river of the same name.

In 1581 Siberia was conquered by the Russians, and the maritime voyages from White Sea to the Bay of Ob naturally became more frequent.

In 1601, in the reign of Boris Godunov, there was founded on the river Taz, which flows into the Gulf of Ob, the city of

Mangazeya, which was located 200 versts from the mouth of the river. This city of Mangazeya grew with unprecedented rapidity, and in some fifteen years became the trading center for the whole of Siberia. The convenience and facility of reaching it by sea attracted the attention of the foreign navigators who visited Archangel. Commerce with Mangazeya developed with great success but unfortunately it attracted the attention of the Voevoda of Moscow, Prince Kurakin, who, finding it difficult to keep this maritime trade under state control, thought it wise to stop it, and thus force all goods for Siberia to be transported thither by land, where they would be subject to close custom supervision. After some delay the idea of Prince Kurakin was put into effect, but trade did not follow the expensive and inconvenient route approved by Prince Kurakin. Mangazeya soon began to decline and toward the middle of the XVII Century finally ceased to exist.

With the prohibition of navigation to Mangazeya, all trade by the northern route was discontinued for more than 250 years, and this commercial route was not only forgotten, but there gradually grew up the legend that it was impossible to navigate the Kara Sea, which came to be considered an impassable ice field. After the renowned voyage of Nordenskioldt on the Vega in 1878-1879, however, the question of the possibility of navigation in the Kara Sea entered a new phase.

Before reviewing the events of this new period, mention must be made of the fact that during the XVIII Century, many efforts were made by the Russian Government to explore the

northern coast of Siberia. Especially interesting was the expedition undertaken on the initiative of the great Russian scientist, Lomonosov, who clearly foresaw the economic and strategic importance of the northern maritime route. Unfortunately no practical results were attained by the expedition of Lomonosov or any other of these attempts, and the general belief in the impossibility of navigation on the Kara Sea gained such strength that when in 1859, a Russian manufacturer, by the name of Sidorov, offered a prize for the discovery of a navigable route by way of the Arctic Ocean, he could not find either in England or in Russia any one willing to make the attempt.

Just prior to Nordenskioldt's expedition in 1877-1878, Nordenskioldt, and shortly after him, Captain Wiggins, had succeeded in reaching the mouth of the Yenisei, on a voyage from Norway, and thus had thrown the first ray of light into the gloom surrounding the question of navigation on the Kara Sea.

In 1877 the above mentioned Sidorov built a small schooner, the "Morning Dawn", for navigation on the Yenisei, which safely arrived in Siberia. The crowning event of all these ventures was the successful voyage of Nordenskioldt from the Bering Straits to Norway in 1878-1879. Many fresh attempts to cross the Kara Sea were made, but, owing to the absence of charts, and ignorance of climatic conditions, most of them proved failures. Gradually these difficulties were so far overcome, and navigation on the Kara Sea so far developed, that Russia enacted a law in 1896, granting for a term of three years special customs reductions on some foreign commodities brought to Siberia by

the northern maritime route. In 1896 and in 1897 as many as three dozen ships entered the Siberian rivers during the summer under this law, with cargoes consisting chiefly of brick-tea, machinery, white resin, cement, salt, etc.

As an illustration of the advantages offered by this route, it may be mentioned that the cost of a chest of brick tea brought from London by sea, was, including the regular customs duty, from 15 to 18 rubles less than that of the same kind brought by land through Mongolia.

In 1898 the advantages accorded to the sea route were cancelled at the instance of some Moscow merchants who feared competition from this new route. The trade by sea was thereupon again checked and the Siberian route once more was abandoned and forgotten.

During the existence of maritime commercial relations with Siberia, river vessels had been brought into the Yenesei, and they became the foundation of a steamer freight and passenger service on this river. Fisheries were established and in the end a regular export of Siberian products to foreign markets was started, and a steamship company for the navigation of the Yenisei was formed. All the above mentioned enterprises were forced to liquidate as soon as the customs reductions for the northern maritime route were withdrawn.

A revival of the sea route took place only in 1905, when, in connection with the Japanese war, the Russian Government was forced to ship large quantities of railroad material to Siberia.

A fleet of river vessels was hastily acquired in England and Germany, and safely arrived at the mouth of the Yenisei, in company with ocean transports and specially chartered ships carrying the railroad material. In all, there were 22 vessels. From here the river boats went up the river to the town of Yeniseysk.

In the same year two steamers with cargoes were despatched to the river Ob by private enterprise and safely reached the town of Tomsk.

This revival of sea transportation by the northern route could, of course, be brought about only by the granting of certain advantages as regards customs duties by the Russian Government, which advantages, however, in 1906 were subjected to such a reduction as again to stop ocean commerce between Europe and Siberia.

But in 1908, in accordance with the desire of the Imperial Duma some work was undertaken to explore the northern route. Especially deserving of mention is the expedition of 1910, which, with two steamers, the "Taimur" and the "Vaigach", demonstrated the possibility of sailing from Vladivostok to the mouth of the Kolyma and further to the westward.

In 1912 and 1913 the Russian Volunteer Fleet made regular trips on this freshly discovered route, so to speak, and carried cargoes for the northern coast of eastern Siberia.

In 1913 these same ships, the "Taimur" and "Vaigach," under command of Captain Virpitsky, went through Bering

Straights and freely, without any difficulty, reached the northern extremity of Asia, Cape Cheliuskin, near which they discovered two hitherto unknown islands, Island of Tsarevich Alexis and the Land of Emperor Nicholas II.

As a result of all these voyages it can now be said to be definitely proven that a steamer of moderate spead can easily make a voyage from Vladivostok to the mouth of the Kolyma, and even to the mouth of the Lena River. The trip from Vladivostok to the mouth of the Kolyma and return takes in all about two months.

In 1911, at the instance of the Ministry of Ways of Communication, the Ministry of Marine and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, a bill was introduced in the Duma to establish a maritime route to the mouths of the Rivers Ob and Yenesei. Especial interest was taken in the development of the part of the northern route by Vurtsel, an engineer of Ways of Communication, and in 1913 a merchant steamer of the usual commercial type, the "Correct," left Stettin. This vessel carried a cargo of about 60,000 puds (1,000 tons) of cement, and about 8,000 puds of various wares. About the middle of June this ship reached Tromsoe, where Vostrotin, a member of the Russian Duma, and Fridtjof Nansen, the celebrated Arctic explorer, embarked. Several other men also took part in this voyage.

On June 24, the "Correct" left Onigsvaga in Norway, rounded North Cape, and heading into the Ocean, reached Novaia Zemlia, somewhat north of the Kara Gates, on June 28th. Passing through the latter, the vessel towards evening of the same

day entered the Kara Sea. After some difficulties encountered in the Kara Sea, owing to ignorance of the waters and also of the ice conditions, the "Correct" reached the mouth of the Yenisei on August 10th. After this it ascended this mighty river for 300 versts (200 miles) where it started to unload its cargo.

The return voyage from the place of unloading to Vardoe in Norway was made in ten days, and on this trip it encountered no difficulties at all on account of ice.

During the trip of the "Correct", three wireless stations were completed and put in operation. In this way the question as to the practical significance of the martime route through the Kara Sea finally received a definite and practical answer.

On the basis of the experiment of the "Correct", commercial voyages to the mouth of the Yenisei River were made in 1914, 1915 and 1916, with very significant success, although war conditions did not allow this beginning to develop to a satisfactory extent.

In order to understand the importance of direct steamship connection with the mouths of the Ob and Yenisei rivers, it is sufficient to note that the northern part of Siberia watered by two rivers, the so-called Turukhan region, comprising a territory of 1,500,000 square versts, contains manifold natural resources. The lower parts of the Ob and Yenisei Rivers have an abundance of various kinds of valuable fish, such as, nelma (Siberian salmon), sturgeon, sterlet, omul, muksun, chir, Turukhan herring, etc.

With the existence of a sea route, the fishing industry in these regions could assume large proportions and the export to the interior Russian markets and abroad might be on a large scale. Before the establishment of sea communication, this rich fishing preserve was left almost entirely undeveloped, the whole export to the interior markets amounting to not more than 160,000 puds (about 2500 tons) of fish.

On the lower course of the Yenisei and its tributaries have been found enormous deposits of very good coal.

On the Tunguska, one of the tributaries of the Yenisei, vast deposits of graphite have been discovered and party explored. Although inferior in quality to the Ceylon graphite, this mineral has a considerable commercial value.

Furthermore, the Ob and Yenisei are enormous waterways, which, even now, in the absence of any improvements, are available for extensive steamship service. In this respect the Yenisei river is of the most interest, being navigable for more than 3,000 versts, (2,000 miles). A comparatively small amount of improvement in its upper section will make Yenisei navigable in its upper course, and thus open a direct water connection with Mongolia.

In fact the Yenisei is the only natural route connecting Mongolia with the civilized world. According to the estimates made after the trip of the "Correct", the cost of transporting one pud of goods from the Baltic or European ports to Kobdo in Mongolia should not exceed 1 ruble 20 kopeks, (about $36 per

ton at normal ruble exchange.) This estimate is made without taking into consideration any improvements in the upper part of the river. If such should be made then the cost of freight would be less than one ruble per pud.

Furthermore, the enormous timber lands in the basin of the Yenisei have been calculated with considerable precision. An approximate estimate of the yearly growth of timber in this region is 90 million puds. Admitting that only one tenth of this increase were to be shipped abroad, even this would be a large item in Russian trade.

Samples of Yenisei timber have already been brought to the European markets and have proved to be of very high quality. In the opinion of Professor Nansen the Yenisei forests are more valuable than those of Norway. It is evident that the development of the timber industry in the Yenisei, being connected with the development of navigation on the river and sea, offers really great prospects for the future.

Extensive territories on the Yenisei as well as on the Ob, especially in their upper courses, are well suited to agriculture. To demonstrate this it is only necessary to point out that the Minusinsk territory, which has long been considered the granary of Siberia, lies in the basin of the upper Yenisei. In the upper part of the Ob system are the agricultural districts of Western Siberia. It is to be expected that with the development of the sea route and navigation in the system of the Ob and the Yenisei, the bread-stuffs of Siberia, the quantity of which must constantly

increase, will flow in a large stream into the Atlantic Oean, i. e., to Europe or the Baltic Sea. According to the latest estimates these possibilities are of very great magnitude. At the time when these estimates were made, Siberia offered great attractions both for Russian and for foreign enterprise. At present this situation has so changed as a consequence of tragic events, that Siberia has entered into a period of the most intense development of its economic life, and at present, we must think not only of the exportation of various kinds of raw materials, but also of the creation of industry on a large scale. A glance at the map is sufficient to show that the industries to be established in Siberia can receive the necessary machinery and materials largely by way of the Ob and the Yenisei. At present, one can only guess at the amount of these imports, but there is no doubt that they will be enormous. The men and enterprises which acquaint themselves now with the sea route from the Atlantic Ocean to the Yenisei will play a great and profitable role in the economic reconstruction of Siberia.

Simultaneously with the discovery of the sea route to the mouth of the Yenisei, the Russian Government undertook some investigation of the possibilities of navigation from Bering Straits to the mouth of the Lena. The result of these explorations shows that the hitherto completely unknown northeast section of Siberia is easily accessible for any kind of ships. As shown by a large number of trips, a steamer can in one summer make with the greatest ease the voyage from Vladivostok to the mouth of the Lena and return without experiencing any

difficulties on account of ice. Along with the discovery of the possibility of navigation to the mouth of the Lena, in 1912 and 1913, voyages were made even to the west of the Lena, and it was demonstrated that navigation in these regions does not meet with any special difficulties. It was merely shown that we hitherto knew little of this region, and because of our ignorance, considered it inaccessible. The meagerness of our knowledge of these regions is shown by the discovery near Cape Cheliuskin of two large islands, the land of the Emperor Nicholas II and the Tsarevich Alexis.

At the present time the whole northern shore of Siberia has been explored except for a distance of about 300 nautical miles, approximately the distance between the mouth of the Yenisei and Cape Cheliuskin. In fairness it must be said that there are in this section a number of islands which render navigation difficult, and so there will be undoubtedly required considerable exploration before this section of the northern sea route can be utilized for commercial navigation. It will undoubtedly be necessary to establish there wireless stations, but the cost of these will be insignificant in comparison with the results attained by the possibility of sailing around Asia by way of the Arctic. The distance from North Cape to Cape Dezhenev is about 3,600 miles, while the route from Europe through the Suez Canal, past Asia to the northern part of the Pacific Ocean, is more than twice as great. Consequently, the northern sea route has undoubtedly a great future.

At the present moment it appears certain that during the

next ten years Siberia will undergo the most intensive development of any country in the world. Consequently navigation along its northern coast may be counted upon to develop greatly. On the other hand it should not be overlooked that during the last few years Alaska in North America has been attracting more and more the attention of capital and enterprise. We may therefore have in view that the possibility of transporting the various products of Alaska to Europe by the northern martime route instead of by the far longer route through the tropics will not be considered unimportant, but rather will be of great commercial interest.

Published by the RUSSIAN ECONOMIC LEAGUE:

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Former Member of the Russian Duma

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